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Selected Poems

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Selected Poems

by
Andre Yang

Waiting

My father, in a bathrobe, is sitting
in the living room watching Monday

Night Raw wrestling. He waits
for my mother, still at the Foster

Farms chicken plant. It could be hours
until he can go to sleep, though

he'll need to be at work in six.
He is probably thinking of her tiny hands

dressed in thin metal gloves, clutching
a blade just large enough

to sever breasts from the carcasses
conveyor belting by. The two have been

married for one year longer than I am alive—
I'll be 29 this year—and he performs this ritual

nightly, each time to a different TV show.
At every commercial break he walks over

to open the front door, as a monk does
a heavy monastery door, to check the night

for any inkling of return.



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Pastoral

My father once got lost in a jungle for days,
 found a tortoise & carried it with him,
 set it down whenever he felt lost & waited
 for the creature to take a step before picking it up
 & following its pointing. When he made it
 back, he placed the tortoise
 by where forest met village & watched it
 disappear into the greenery. *Jungle spirits*
always care for their own he said to me, *that's why*
we offer them thanks for the things they give.
 It has been weeks since this conversation
 & this evening I look out at the western horizon
 where dark objects have begun
 unfurling like a lazy cat's yawn,
 like the steady leaning of the Valley
 Oak outside my window, slowly right,
 then back against the wind, then back again. I wait
 & wait for hours for the sky to turn
 from blue to red, orange, then black,
 for constellations to rebuild themselves,
 the North Star to show me how
 my ancestors used it to guide them
 through the night, for Orion's Belt to reveal itself
 as the sash worn by Nuj Yob, father
 of funerary qeej playing, for Taurus
 to become the water buffalo he uses to plow
 his fields, readying the mountainsides
 for a new harvest of rice or corn
 or babies. I squint now in this darkness,
 find myself in the exact consciousness
 between sleep & wake, relate this
 to the sound of light sifting through clouds,
 of mice doing whatever it is they do
 in fields, of a young man holding
 a qeej to his mouth to blow a botched song.

Meeting a Young Monk in late Spring

I walk out of the Student Union & am
 stopped by a man, a monk who looks
 my age. He offers a modest smile
 & book on Theravada Buddhism, asks me
 to learn what it could do for me. I politely
 refuse, tell him I am a student taking literature
 courses heavy with reading & wouldn't have
 the time, but really I'd just spent my last two
 bucks on a bottle of Brisk iced tea, & figured
 he'd follow up with a request for donation
 if I accepted. The monk's persistence,
 however, is admirable—he turns
 the book over, asks me to read the words of Henry
 David Thoreau & Gary Snyder, what *they* have
 to say about Buddhism, & leaves
 the reconsidering to me. Again, I refuse,
 but notice the sweat on his brow, & offer
 him my bottle. The monk accepts, bows,
 & I leave him standing in the sun.

About the Author



Andre Yang lives in Fresno, California. He is a founding member of the Hmong American Writers' Circle (HAWC), where he conducts and participates in public writing workshops. He is currently studying creative writing (poetry) in the MFA program at California State University, Fresno, where he is a Graduate Equity Fellow, Provost Scholar, a Philip Levine Scholar, and a CSU Trustees/William Randolph Hearst Scholar. There, he divides his time between teaching freshman composition, poetry, and working on the editorial staff of *The Normal School* literary magazine. Andre is a Kundiman Asian American Poetry Fellow, attended the Tin House Summer Writers Workshop and the Napa Valley Writers' Conference, and has been recently accepted into the UCROSS Residency Program. His poetry has appeared in *Paj Ntaub Voice*, *Hyphen* magazine, and the chapbook anthology "Here Is a Pen" (Achiote Press) and *How Do I Begin?: A Hmong American Literary Anthology* (Heyday), of which he was also co-editor.



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